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Resumption of Bonobo Studies at Wamba, the Luo Reserve for Scientific Research*Takeshi Furuichi¹ and Ndunda Mwanza²**¹Wamba Committee for Bonobo Research
Faculty of International Studies, Meiji-Gakuin University**²Research Center for Ecology and Forestry***Introduction**

Due to the civil war, a long-term study on bonobos (*bilua*) at Wamba, in the northern section of the Luo Reserve for Scientific Research, was interrupted in 1996. Since that time, we have made various attempts to resume the study, but the second civil war of 1998 made it even more difficult. This was the first long absence of researchers since Dr. Takayoshi Kano started the research work at Wamba in 1973.

In March 2002, the civil war moved toward ceasefire, and we asked our local assistants to start observation of bonobos. They began following bonobos on an everyday basis and subsequently reported that the bonobos of our study groups still survived. We made short visits to Wamba in August 2002 and then successfully observed bonobos in August 2003. This is a brief report from this latest expedition.

Our base camp in Wamba was looted during the 1st civil war in 1996. However, there had been no fighting during the second civil war from 1998, and the current security situation around Wamba was much better than we expected. This was probably because Wamba was located deep in the territory of the government forces, and there was nothing to fight for around Wamba, except for the bonobos in the forest.

During the 2nd civil war, soldiers engaged in

poaching. One of our local assistants was forced by soldiers to guide them to the sleeping site of bonobos, and they shot and ate a sub-adult male called Shijimi. Though there was no other confirmed poaching, similar poaching by the soldiers or local people might have occurred during the war. Bonobos were attractive hunting prey for soldiers and people coming from other areas because, unlike people living at Wamba, many of those people had no taboo against killing bonobos.

Observation of bonobos who survived the war

We made our first observation of bonobos of the E1 group on August 14, and we could follow them until August 21, when we concluded the expedition of this time (Figure 1). Though we had been giving bonobos artificial food in the provisioning sites until 1996, we decided to stop provisioning from the resumption of the study. Therefore, we had to follow their ranging in the natural forest. In spite of our long absence, the bonobos of the E1 group did not flee from the observers, and we could follow them from their bed site in the morning until they made beds in the evening. Being very well habituated, they fed, groomed, played, and slept in front of observers. We could sometimes approach them as close as 5 meters on the ground.

Though our stay at Wamba was very short, we could confirm the presence of 12 individuals in the E1 group. These included 2 adult males, 2 sub-adult males, 4 adult females, 1 juvenile female, and 3 infants. These 12 members were ranging together by forming a mixed party throughout our stay. The local assistants reported that 2 other identified adult females with infants had been observed until recently, so they might have been ranging separately during our observation. Thus we concluded that the number of E1 group members was between 12 and 16. Because the group size was 19 when we finally left Wamba in 1996, it may have decreased by 3 to 7 individuals (15 to 35%) during the war. This brought us hope, however, that an adult female immigrated into the E1 group, and 3 infants were born, during our absence. At any rate, we need to confirm the members of the E1 group that



Figure 1 Bonobos of the E1 group.

survived the war by further observation. Also, we need to confirm the situation of 6 other study groups. Because those groups were living in the marginal area of the Luo Reserve, there might have been a greater loss of members during the war.

Programs for study and conservation

With the support of the National Geographic Committee for Research and Exploration, we are now carrying out continuous research on the ecology of bonobos. We are recording fruit production by monthly census on the line transect and recording ranging route, feeding activities, 1-hour party size, and bed group size. The Congolese researchers of the Research Center are carrying out continuous research on Ecology and Forestry (CREF): at least 2 researchers are staying at Wamba for the next 2 years. We also began support of the reconstruction of infrastructure in the local communities. We are repairing bridges on the main road and providing materials for construction of local schools. We hope that these activities will

be helpful for local people to acknowledge the importance of the conservation of bonobos and that they will continue or reinforce their own tradition of coexistence with bonobos.